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Sweden

Livestock and Products

First Case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Sweden

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Report Highlights:

The aggressive form of the avian influenza virus has now reached Sweden. On February 28, 2006, the National Veterinary Institute (SVA) confirmed the highly pathogenic H5 virus in two wild mallard ducks.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Unscheduled Report
Stockholm [SW1]
[SW]

Highly Pathogenic Bird Flu Arrives in Sweden

The aggressive form of the avian influenza (AI) virus has now reached Sweden. On February 28, 2006, the National Veterinary Institute (SVA) confirmed the highly pathogenic H5 virus in two wild mallard ducks.

At a 1:00 pm press conference held immediately after the official announcement, the Swedish Minister of Agriculture, Ann-Christin Nykvist, stated that this finding is serious but not unexpected. Sweden is the ninth country within the EU affected by the aggressive bird flu virus.

Following the discovery of the H5N1 virus on the German island of Rügen, situated 100 kilometers (about 62 miles) from the Swedish border, the Swedish government intensified its monitoring of wild birds within Sweden's coastal areas.

The two infected wild ducks were found in close proximity to the nuclear power plant in Oskarshamn on the southeast coast of Sweden – about 150 miles south of Stockholm. So far, tests have confirmed that the infection is a highly pathogenic H5 virus, most likely related to strains found in Russia, China and Nigeria. Tests to identify the subtype will be carried out at the EU's animal disease reference laboratory in Weybridge, England. Results are expected in approximately one week. So far, all recent findings of the aggressive H5 virus have been the H5N1 subtype.

Swedish Board of Agriculture Takes Swift Action

As a result of the findings in Sweden, the Swedish Board of Agriculture (BOA) took immediate protective measures based on EU requirements including:

- The establishment of a protection and monitoring zone in the affected area in order to prevent the disease from spreading to domestic poultry flocks. Dead wild birds will be either tested or destroyed. The protection and monitoring zone has a radius of 10 kilometers (6.21 miles) from the site where the infected birds were found.
- Transport of poultry will be restricted within the protection and monitoring zone. The few domestic poultry flocks located within the zone, as well as a bird sanctuary, will be carefully monitored and tested. Extra security measures will be taken. Any trade in bird products from the area will be restricted.

Preparedness for an AI outbreak in Sweden has been high. The affected authorities have practiced simulation exercises in anticipation of an actual outbreak of avian flu and other bird diseases including Newcastle disease. On February 15, in response to the AI findings on the German island, the BOA ordered that all domestic birds be kept indoors.

The affected birds most likely arrived in Sweden in October-November 2005. Mallards migrate from the east and stay the winter in Sweden.

In general, the Government of Sweden (GOS) is opposed to vaccinating birds for avian influenza. At this stage, vaccination is not an option. However, should conditions change significantly, the GOS will carefully consider all options.